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Turkey's Brain Drain:

An Interpretative Analysis of Skilled Migrants' Experiences in the Netherlands

by

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Abstract

The increasing number of skilled individuals leaving Turkey has become one of the most debated topics in Turkey as well as in the news, opinion pieces related to Turkey. Both the political and public discourses have been revolving around the fact that secular, educated and oppositional youth are leaving Turkey due to the country's recent political crisis. This thesis investigates to what extend this discourse is relevant for Turkish skilled migrants in the Netherlands. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with six skilled migrants in different Dutch cities. In accordance with their experiences and interpretations of events, this thesis concludes that the skilled migrants interpret their migration as a result of rooted structural reasons rather than the short-term political situation.

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“Brains go where brains are.
Brains go where there is a challenge.
Brains go where brains are valued for
intellectual as well as practical achievements.”

Phillip H. Abelson, 1965

Introduction

Brain drain has recently become one of the hot topics in Turkey. Academics, professionals, experts; i.e. skilled and educated individuals, are increasingly leaving the country for short or long term (Gall 2019). Several news articles and opinion pieces relate the recent brain drain to the rise of authoritarianism, religious nationalism, the government's strict control over the universities and the economy's decline (Kiniklioglu 2014; Lowen 2017; Waller 2018). The emerging public discourse and narratives are that skilled individuals, for political as well as economic reasons, do not want to live in 'Erdoğan's Turkey' and that they are searching for alternatives outside of the country. There is, however, very little data and not many scholarly investigations of this new phenomenon.

Since 2016, a systematic attack on academic freedom through dismissals of professors from the most prestigious universities, bans on their passports, and the shutting down of civil society and non-governmental organizations demonstrate the seriousness of the pressure which is mostly felt by highly educated individuals, academics and intellectuals. The recent series of events have generated the narrative that the authoritarian policies of the government push skilled individuals to look for opportunities outside of Turkey (Kiniklioglu 2014; Waller 2018). In this research, I analyse how meaningful this narrative is for skilled migrants when we listen to their lived experiences.

I ask the questions of: why do skilled individuals increasingly leave Turkey? How do they justify their migration project? More specifically, to what extend the current narrative is relevant in their interpretation of the events? Instead of trying to conclude generalizable

findings, I analyse what is meaningful for skilled individuals to decide to leave, or/and not return. Hence, opting for an interpretivist method, I conducted semi-structured in-depth

interviews with skilled Turkish[1] migrants in the Netherlands. I focus on one sending and one receiving country and have purposefully chosen The Netherlands (as the receiving country) for this study because of its attractiveness for skilled individuals.

In the first section of this thesis, I first explain the concept of brain drain, before focusing on the reasons for brain drain in the broader context and delving into the case of Turkey. The second section of this thesis lays out the methodology and research design as well as a justification for the importance of conducting interviews for such a research. In the third section, I explain the categories I created based on the transcribed interviews and analyse them. I focus on the most prominent and recurrent themes, concepts and events to analyse the interviews according to these categories. I then discuss my findings and the limitations of the study.

Various structural and individual reasons cause migration according to the interviewees. Even though the country's current political climate has a major influence on the interviewees, none of them indicate that the main reason of their migration was that. Instead, they argue that a change in the political structure would not alter their decision to return as it was not their main motivation to move abroad. Instead, the main tendency is that the skilled individuals leave due to structural reasons (including cultural and socio-economic reasons) which convinced them that leaving would be the best of their interest in the long-term.

[1] Throughout this thesis, without making any ethnicity distinction, I use the word Turkish to refer people who hold a Turkish passport and are from Turkey.

1. What is brain drain?

Brain drain, in the simplest way, is defined as the emigration of a nation's most skilled individuals in pursuit of better life standards and better income opportunities. The OECD defines 'skilled individuals' as those who hold a university diploma (Freitas et al. 2012). According to economists' concerns, this type of migration is usually considered from developing to developed countries (Gibson and McKenzie 2011; Scott 2006). The term brain drain, therefore, is disputed due to its negative connotation with the word 'drain' as it is referring to a serious loss of skilled individuals in developing countries (Gibson and McKenzie 2011; Güngör and Tansel 2014).

The recent literature on brain drain points out that in some contexts and instances, skilled migration benefits the sending country through remittances or migrant returns (Oosterbeek and Webbink 2011; Gibson and McKenzie 2011; Güngör and Tansel 2014). It is therefore difficult to consider it merely as a negative phenomenon. As a result, alternative choices of words are used to refer to the phenomenon, such as 'brain circulation' to avoid the negative connotation of 'drain' (Ansah 2002). However, the term 'brain drain' is still widely used without taking into account the normative meaning. In this thesis, I use the terms brain drain and skilled migration interchangeably due to their wide-spread use in the public/political discourse (especially in the Turkish context).[2]

[2] In Turkish, the literal translation of brain drain is ‘brain migration’, *beyin göçü.* Although it has a closer meaning to skilled migration, which sounds as a more neutral wording, the common sense about *beyin göçü* is negative, therefore, it can be considered as closer to ‘brain drain’ as well.

1.1. The reasons of brain drain

The consequences of brain drain have been an important focus for policy papers and reports regarding the developmental and economic aspects of the issue, while the socio-economic and cultural explanations and of skilled migration are usually neglected (Scott 2006; Ansah 2002; Gibson and McKenzie 2011). The literature mainly focuses on the normative and ethical questions regarding the positive and negative effects of brain drain for the receiving and the sending countries (Gökbayrak 2009; Oosterbeek and Webbink 2011; Ansah 2002; Çaglar Özden and Schiff 2006). The scope of this thesis allows me to only focus on the socio-economic and political reasons of brain drain.

In its broadest explanation, brain drain is considered as a consequence of the globalization and internationalisation of the labour market which has increased labour mobility and facilitated this type of migration by widening the scope of the job market, especially for skilled individuals (Ansah 2002; Crush 2002). Scott (2006) argues that the uniform culture of globalization, expand use of English language, and the growth of a post-industrial middle class have widened the number of middle-class skilled migrants. In addition to that, the fact that the middle class is more mobile than it used to, our understanding of distance has changed. As a result, short or long-term migration has especially become more common amongst skilled and educated individuals.

In this thesis, I consider brain drain as a consequence of globalization as elaborated above. However, there are various reasons that make brain drain more or less likely in different contexts. In the existing literature, there are two main discussions regarding the reasons of brain

drain: economic explanations and structural explanations. Even though these two are not excluding one another, structural explanations cover socio-economic, political and cultural

reasons while the former considers brain drain merely as an economic phenomenon and leave out the other factors (Ansah 2002). Economic explanations consider brain drain as a matter of demand and supply in the international labour market in which skilled workers calculate rationally how they can achieve "the highest reward from their education and training" (Ansah 2002, 21), and migrate accordingly.

On the other hand, there are various other structural factors including the economic factors. One of them is the country's population size in developing countries which facilitates brain drain (Gibson and McKenzie 2011). Indeed, less populated countries are more likely to have higher shares of skilled migrants. Moreover, Gibson and McKenzie (2011) argue that in less populated developing countries, religious and political conflicts as well as low levels of human capital also induce brain drain. Better income opportunities and better quality of life in abroad are also considered as the structural reasons of brain drain (Gibson and McKenzie 2011; Freitas et al. 2012).

Another important structural factor is studying abroad which increases the likelihood of brain drain in different contexts (Oosterbeek and Webbink 2011, Akçapar 2017). For instance, in the Netherlands, Oosterbeek and Webbink (2011) have found that studying abroad increases the level of skilled migration amongst Dutch students. The state scholarships and Bologna Process encourages students to study abroad or join exchange programs which as a result increases the likelihood of students not-returning.

Student non-return is a commonly studied phenomenon in brain drain literature (Güngör and Tansel 2014; Akçapar 2017). Although the initial movement cannot be considered as skilled migration, some scholars argue that student mobility is an important indicator for

potential brain drain in the future (Oosterbeek and Webbink 2011; Freitas et al. 2012; Güngör and Tansel 2014).

The various structural reasons consequently effect individuals' decisions for leaving. However, not every skilled individual in developing countries migrate, even if their chances to earn additional income or have a better quality of life are higher in a developed country. In addition to that, some scholars have found that individuals assess their mobility on various reasons, rather than simply socio-economic reasons (Gibson and McKenzie 2011; Ansah 2002).

For example, Gibson and McKenzie (2011)'s research in New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Tonga show that career concerns, life style and family reasons are more common reasons for skilled individuals to migrate than better income opportunities. Phillip Abelson (1965) also criticises the income-oriented view of brain drain. He argues that brains do not necessarily go where the money does, but they seek appreciation, better working conditions and challenging environments at the work place. Monteleone and Torrisi (2012) also argue that skilled individuals tend to migrate to countries where they can find more satisfying job opportunities and where they are more appreciated than in their home country.

1.2. Turkey's brain drain

The literature on Turkish skilled migration is relatively new. Although labour migration from Turkey to Western European countries in the 60s and 70s constitute an important part of the Turkish migration literature (Inglis et al., 2009), skilled migration is a new phenomenon. Nevertheless, there is a recent body of literature which investigates the reasons of skilled migration from Turkey to other countries.

Most recent studies about Turkey's brain drain show that the reasons of skilled migration vary. Güngör and Tansel (2014) argue that economic instability in Turkey and

income differentials with other countries constitute the most important reason for skilled individuals to migrate. Another important structural reason is the working conditions.

Engineers in Turkey, for example, constitute a significant source of brain drain because their work environments does not provide them with research and development opportunities, and they therefore search for alternative solutions outside of Turkey (Gökbayrak 2012). Similarly, academic brain drain is also related to low incomes and limited fund and scholarships for researchers, as well as "problematic human relations" which makes academia a less desired field of work in Turkey (Gökbayrak 2012, 137).

Similar to what Oosterbeek and Webbink (2011) have found in the Netherlands, Güngör and Tansel (2007) have also provided that studying abroad has a significant impact for Turkish students to not return as well as holding a PhD degree. Akçapar (2017) argues that most of the student or trainee non-return are related to misinformation in the labour market. Kwok and Lelaknd (1982 cited in Akçapar 2017) explain that employers in the sending country have little information about the value of the foreign-trained students and workers, while the destination (training) country is more aware of the value of the training (Akçapar 2017).

Akçapar (2017) concludes that Turkey suffers from a lack of coordination between the education system and employment policies. Student returns are either temporary or depend on the quality of jobs they can find in Turkey, especially since an increasing number of university graduates have difficulties to find quality jobs (Gökbayrak 2009). This results in dissatisfaction, exhaustion and consequently direct skilled individuals to consider alternatives.

Since 2017, there has been a new narrative about Turkey's brain drain. Very recently, several opinion pieces and news reports have published that Turkey's young and educated individuals increasingly leave Turkey because of the country's current political and economic crisis (BBC 2019). Some argue that secular and skilled "Young Turks" escape from Erdogan's

autocratic rule and religious nationalism (Kiniklioglu 2014; Waller 2018). Even though there are no available data about why skilled individuals leave, political and the public discourse both

point to the current (short-term) political situation of the country. A migration scholar Dr Murat Erdoğan spoke to the newspaper BirGün explaining the following (BirGün 2018):

> "In the last couple of years, there is a concerning migration flow from Turkey to other countries. We can easily see it from the data that they are mostly young and skilled individuals. This indicates a serious brain drain threat for Turkey and we know that it's main source of power is the people, not the natural sources in this country."

He continues,

> "Unfortunately, we do not have an available data showing why these young people leave. However, we can guess from the fact that people think that their skills and education are not valuable in the eyes of their employers. Second, we have a very tense and conflictual society now. This affects people. Third, they do not trust the rule of law. If someone is feeling unsecure about their tomorrow, the escape is inevitable."[3]

While we know that international migration from Turkey has increased 42% in the last two years, the government's Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) does not provide the type of migration (BBC 2019). The only information we have is the migrants' gender and age (TÜİK n.d.). It is therefore difficult to determine their background and reasons for migration. Nevertheless, as it is this thesis' concern, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND) in the Netherlands has published that while around 540 skilled migrants from Turkey applied for naturalisation in 2016, the number of applications has increased to 1020 in the first 11 months of 2018 (Özkan 2019). This available data allows me to focus on migration from Turkey to the Netherlands as this sharp increase is worth to investigate.

Within the context elaborated above, I have found that migrants' voices were given very little attention in the brain drain literature even though the public and political discourse is dominated by the narrative explained above. In the next section, I explain my methodology and design for this research as well as why it is important to conduct interviews with skilled individuals to explain Turkey's recent brain drain.

[3] Translated from Turkish to English by me.

2. Methodology and Research Design

The previous literature on brain drain is mostly based on quantitative survey analyses which aim to explain it with a purely positivistic approach (Docquier and Rapoport 2012; Dustmann, Fadlon, and Weiss 2011; Özden and Schiff 2006). Much of this literature aims to understand the implications and consequences of skilled migration for the receiving and sending countries, rather than analysing and focusing on the various reasons of why the skilled migrants leave (Docquier and Rapoport 2012; Dustmann, Fadlon, and Weiss 2011; Özden and Schiff 2006).

Even though there is a number of studies which conduct survey interviews with skilled migrants to investigate and generalize the reasons of brain drain (Akçapar 2017; Güngör and Tansel 2014), they ask the same questions to each interviewee and fail to interact with them. Using survey methods, and therefore not engaging with interviewees, it is difficult to gather information about their personality, the details of the events which led to their migration, and how they interpret them (Rubin and Rubin 2005).

In this research, my aim is not to create an overarching generalization about the reasons of brain drain. Instead, I focus on the experiences, representations and meaning-making process of skilled migrants while trying to understand their reasoning for leaving or not returning. Moreover, the period I focus on is after 2015 which, according to the narrative, is the period during which skilled individuals have increasingly left Turkey. I argue that there are no single realities when it comes to migrants' reasons for leaving, but there are the perceptions and interpretations of events (Yanow 2006). Hence, I use the interpretative method in order to understand "the perspective of the actor in the situation" (Yanow 2006, 13).

As a Turkish skilled individual living in the Netherlands, I took into account

methodological concerns about the reliability of this research and made sure to be aware of my biases. As Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2012, 98) argue, “there is no place to stand outside of the social world that allows a view of truth unmediated by human language and embeddedness

in circumstance". In that sense, assuming that the researcher cannot recognize its own biases and be aware of his or her own values and beliefs and self-filter them is "logically inconsistent with the phenomenological and hermeneutic premises that underpin interpretive understanding of science" (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2012, 98).

2.1. Interviews

In-depth conversational interviews are considered applicable in this type of studies, which aim to build a theory or explain a phenomenon (Barakso, Sabet, and Schaffner 2014). By making use of the "ordinary language interview" (OLI) (Schaffer 2006), and "responsive interviewing" (Rubin and Rubin 2005) methods, I engaged with the participants in a conversation during which the information and knowledge were created (Legard, Keegan, and Ward 2003). In order to understand why skilled migrants leave, and what are their experiences, feelings and interpretation of the events, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with six participants.

Before conducting the interviews, I anticipated that most of the interviewees would be aware of the current narrative about brain drain since it is dominating the public and political discourses. In addition to that, I expected them to already follow Turkish and international media, especially since the topic is relevant to them. I therefore did not ask direct questions about the political aspect of their migration and explained that I was doing a research about Turkish skilled migrants living in the Netherlands.[4] I asked open-ending questions and wanted to see in which part of the interview they would prefer to talk about Turkish politics. Eventually,

[4] After I stopped recording them, all the participants wanted to ask more about the aim of the research, and we discussed the research and the questions in more details after the interview.

they all mentioned politics and culture as an enforcing element of their decision to leave, although not the only reason.[5]

Since I introduced myself in the beginning of the interviews, some of the interviewees assumed that I would know the context, and some of the details of certain events.[6] When the interviewees passed over some events or explained less, I overcame this problem by using prompt questions such as "elaboration" (could you please explain more?), and "example prompts" (could you give an example?) or "restatement questions" (you are saying that…) (Schaffer 2006, 154), to ask them to tell me more about their stories.

The responsive interview method is also crucial for this study since it relies on the interpretive constructionist philosophy, and that it considers both the interviewee and the interviewer as part of the process of information creation (Rubin and Rubin 2005). This method also allowed me as well as the interviewees to feel more flexible throughout the interview. While they were referring me as "siz" (formal *you* in Turkish) in the beginning of the conversations, they have begun to use "sen" (informal *you* in Turkish) by the end of the interview. They felt comfortable to tell their memories without hesitation or share their tears and laughter. Therefore, I felt that they were not trying to censor or divert their stories.

There were some conflicting answers that I challenged as much as I could when I caught them during the interview. Unfortunately, I realised some others during the transcription process, but it was too late to confront them. However, most of these conflicts were resolved by the end of the interviews because I kept asking confirming questions. I believe that this was caused by the fact that there are no single events, or major happenings that pushed them–

[5] See the interview guide and questions, pg. 34

[6] I introduced myself as a master's student at Leiden University and originally from İstanbul, Turkey.

individually–outside of Turkey. Therefore, while they were thinking about one thing which was really annoying for them, they never seriously considered any single event as a reason to leave the country. It was also expressed in all the interviews that they have never thought about this 'leaving process' in such a detailed way.

2.2. Interviewees' Profile[7]

I found the interviewees with snow balling method (friends and association on Facebook and WhatsApp). In order to be categorized as skilled migrants, the participants need to have obtained (at least) their bachelor's degree in Turkey. All the interviewees were born, raised, and lived most of their life (at least until the age of 23) in Turkey. I interviewed six skilled individuals targeting migrants who moved to the Netherlands after 2015 because of the focus of this thesis which is to understand the impact of current narrative on the migrants' interpretation of events.

Table 1. Interviewees' demographic information

Gender	**Age**	**Previous residence in Turkey**	**Residence in the Netherlands**	**Occupation**	**Employed as**	**Level of Education**
Female	27	Eskişehir	Nijmegen	Lecturer	Lecturer	MA
Female	26	İzmir	Rotterdam	Art manager	Waitress	MA
Male	25	Ankara	The Hague	Architect	Student	MSc
Female	29	İstanbul	Eindhoven	Engineer	Engineer	BSc
Male	29	İstanbul	Eindhoven	Engineer	Engineer	BSc
Male	33	Antalya	Eindhoven	Engineer	Engineer	BSc

[7] Table 1. Interviewees' demographic information.

I also aimed for gender equality; however, this was harder than I thought. The first time I attempted to find participants through friends' connections, there were only female volunteers. I had to reject some of them to be able to interview male individuals as well. In the end, I interviewed 3 female and 3 male participants. 3 out of 6 interviewees are married, and 2 out of 6 have the civil partnership agreement in the Netherlands with their partners.

The interviewees expressed that they would feel more comfortable if the interviews were conducted in Turkish, therefore, all the interviews were conducted in Turkish and translated by me. Depending on the availability, the interviews were held on Skype, Facebook Videocall and in person, but all face to face. The interviews lasted between 25 and 75 minutes, with an average of 45 minutes. The interviewees allowed me to use voice recorder and cite their first name in this thesis.[8]

I initially thought that questioning people only in the Netherlands would create certain limitations in terms of the responses I would get. Moreover, I was afraid that the respondents' economic and social backgrounds might show similarities, because they are all highly educated and skilled individuals so that their economic background could have eased their migration in the first place. However, as Scott (2006) argues, because of the increasing scope of both the middle class and the job market, the respondents come from different economic and family backgrounds which made the answers more relevant.

[8] The consent form was oral.

3. The Experience of Turkish Skilled Migrants in the Netherlands

In this section, I analyse the transcribed interviews in accordance with the existing literature on brain drain and the most recurrent themes, concepts and events in the participants' responses. I divide this section into two parts: the interpretation of migrants' reasons for leaving (1) and their intentions to stay or return (2). By doing that, I aim to understand how the migrants represent their migration and under which conditions they would consider returning. The narrative, which I explained earlier (See section 2, part 1), is that skilled individuals leave Turkey because of the current political situation of the country and I expect to understand to what extend this is relevant for the interviewees.

3.1. Reasons for leaving

In this part, I analyse the migrants' meaning making and interpretation of their migration and see whether it matches with the literature and the current narrative about brain drain. In the transcribed interviews, there are various concepts, events, and topics. In order to analyse the data, I gather the most repeating of them under three themes (Rubin and Rubin 2005). To really answer the question and find something meaningful in the interviews, I break up the arguments in distinct categories based on the socio-economic, political and cultural concepts and events (See Table 2).

Life standards (Social/economic)	Uncertainty (Political/economic)	Othering (Political/cultural)

♦ Opportunities ♦ Work-life balance	♦ Future anxiety ♦ Rule of law	♦ Judging (societal control) ♦ Problematic human relations

Table 2. Reasons for leaving

i. Life Standards

According to the relevant literature, life standards and income opportunities are the primary reasons for brain drain (Gibson and McKenzie 2011; Freitas et al. 2012). Not surprisingly, various socio-economic reasons related to the interviewees' life standards came up as the reasoning behind their migration during the interviews as well.

Instead of income-oriented complaints, all the interviewees focused more on structural socio-economic problems they experienced in Turkey. Their lifestyle was worse in Turkey not because their disposable income was lower, but because of the lack of opportunities and poor working conditions such as: long working hours (even if this meant a higher income), not having enough green areas and parks, crowded streets and traffic in cities. Even though the recent currency crisis and economic instability arose as topics during some of the interviews, none of the interviewee explained their migration merely as a consequence of Turkey's declining economy.

Opportunities

One of the most important commonalities is that all the respondents came from a big city in Turkey. Although not originally from İstanbul, 4 out of 6 interviewees have either lived in İstanbul or studied there for a period of time, and the other 2 are from other big cities: Ankara and Antalya. They are aware of the opportunities that living in big cities provides them, but they all complain about certain factors that make these opportunities almost impossible to reach.

In comparison with the opportunities in Turkey, they see the opportunities in the Netherlands as relatively more accessible.

In addition to that, better working conditions and career opportunities, appreciation in the work place and challenging work environments were all recurrent concepts and events which are also relevant to the reviewed literature.(Monteleone and Torrisi 2012)

Work-life balance

The concept of work-life balance was also an important and common concept which was mentioned by all the interviewees. According to them, the lack of holiday hours, not being able to spend the money they earn, and having problematic human relations in their work environment was described as mentally and physically tiring. As Gibson and McKenzie (2011) argue, in some cases, career concerns are more important for skilled migrants than how much additional income they earn in abroad. Dicle, for example, defined her main motivation to move abroad as follows:

> *Interviewer:* Can you tell me what was your main motivation to move abroad?
>
> *Dicle:* (…) In summary, I can say that my main considerations when I was moving were my career, my freedom, and a better future for myself.

While Aykut stressed that the reason he considered working abroad was not having a satisfactory 'work-life balance' in Turkey.

> *Aykut:* My main problem was that, I have never had chance to take holidays, or free time. Although I was earning a lot, I was not respected as a human being at the work place.

In addition to not having an acceptable work-life balance, the respondents also complained about the problematic working conditions and human relations, which were also mentioned in the literature especially in the case of engineers and academics in Turkey

(Gökbayrak 2012). Ozan argued that he got old and lost his hair in the last 10 months he spent in Turkey before he moved to the Netherlands. He added that his economic situation was not

the worst when he compared to other engineers around him. However, he told me that he was sick of the corruption and exploitation in the construction sector:

> *Interviewer:* Would you have considered coming to the Netherlands if Turkey's economy was not as bad as you explained now?
>
> *Ozan:* Actually, my wife and I were working, and we were earning quite well. It was okay. That's why, if you ask me, I would say that my main reason was the human factor, like 75%. The economic factor is about 25%. In our sector [construction], for example, I am an electricity chef, but we also had a construction chef who is the construction engineer. He never had holidays. He was working 11 hours a day, 6 days a week. No contract, no anything. A colleague and a friend of mine, who is doing this job for 10 years, one day, he was asked by his employer: "Okay, the situation is getting worse in Turkey, as a business we need to make some arrangements. You will earn half of your income from now on. Do you still want to continue to work with us? Otherwise there is someone who can replace you, just so you know." Can you imagine? How this person can live his life? Survive? They do not care. I know this is not only the employer's fault, this is the system, the whole capitalist system is forcing us to do these things. But here [in the Netherlands], at least, we can have rights. And we are treated as human beings.

Similar to Ozan, Pelin also constantly gave examples from other people's working conditions. She stated that, compared to the people she knows, she was lucky because her working conditions were not 'as bad' (Pelin, personal communication, May 2019). Throughout the interviews, I took notes about the interviewees' tendency to give examples from the people and events which do not affect their lives fundamentally but exhaust them. Ozan, for example, expressed that he was emotionally tired at his work place. Because even though he was receiving his income regularly, he said that he was feeling the depression of those who were not paid that month such as the cleaning personal or the workers (Ozan, personal communication, May 2019).

ii. Uncertainty

The concept of uncertainty was used to refer to both economic and political issues during the interviews. The future anxiety, currency (they mostly named it as Euro) crisis and lack of trust in the judicial system were the most reoccurring topics. The interviewees stressed

that they were feeling increasingly uncertain about their future in Turkey. Although they were worried about how the currency crisis would change their economic situation in the future, they indicated that, unless travelling abroad (in the eurozone), none of their purchasing power within Turkey did seriously decrease. This is why, not trusting the authorities and the judicial system indicated a more serious uncertainty on their behalf.

I avoided asking direct questions about politics or discussing politics with the interviewees, however, it was unavoidable due to the content of the research. The current narrative in Turkey is so strong that the interviewees seemed that they needed to tell me that they did not 'escape' from Turkey, but that their decision to leave was a process and the consequence of a series of several events, justifying that they were forced to do so. Although this sounds dramatic enough, none of the interviewees have had any trouble with the officials nor were they faced with serious discriminations. In fact, all of them argued that they were apolitical until they were politicized. The common discourse during the interviews was that they were 'ordinary people' doing their 'ordinary things' but their 'ordinary life' was so much affected by the policies makers' decisions that they have found themselves 'politicized'. Although political reasons did not constitute the most important motivation for leaving for most of them, Pelin argued that her main motivation was 'political':

> *Interviewer:* I understand. You said so many things now, many reasons that lead you here. But what do you think is the most important factor amongst these?
>
> *Pelin:* Actually, I forgot to mention the most important one. The politics and the culture in Turkey.
>
> *Interview:* Can you explain what do you mean by that?
>
> *Pelin:* The fact that I can't feel free in Turkey. I believe that it is because I have always felt that

I was living in a society that cannot understand me. You go somewhere, you dress, you feel comfortable and beautiful in that dress, and someone just thinks that they have the right to cat call you or harass you because you are confident. If you ask why this is political, I can say that our crime-punishment system is not arranged appropriately. On the one hand you see that people are punished by the crime they did not commit, on the other hand, major crimes are not punished by our judiciary. At some point I started to feel like, well, if my neighbour hates me

> for some other reason, they can just espionage me for a crime I did not commit, and I can go to jail for something I did not do. And I see that happening to other people, I am not making it up. This scares me, I think this causes a great uncertainty and fear. I used to say that I would do good things for my country, and be a good citizen there, but then I realised, no. Even if you are good, you never know what will happen. I do not think this way anymore, and I have become a world citizen, I have removed the borders in my head, and maybe that's a good thing.

In the excerpt above, we can see that Pelin does not define one problem independently from the other. Similar to other respondents, she also interprets her migration as a result of a combination of various events. Aykut also complained about the same type of feeling of insecurity because of a lacking rule of law in the country. He said that "you never know, one day someone is annoyed by you and you find yourself in jail for something else" (Aykut, personal communication, May 2019).

iii. Othering (*ötekileştirme*)

The concept othering, *ötekileştirme* in Turkish, is the last but not the least of the most prominent elements in the interviews. In the last couple of years, the term has become one of the most used words in the Turkish public discourse to describe situations in which people feel 'othered' in society (Çay Sağlam and Yaşar 2017). Nahya (2011 cited in Çay Sağlam and Yaşar 2017) defines the term othering as "a form of thinking and perception style that occurs through judgements, prejudices and labelling". [9][10]

[9] For further explanation of the concept of *the other* and *othering* in social identity literature: (Tajfel 1981; Bar-Tal 1998; Jensen 2011)

[10] The interviewees used the concept interchangeably with “labelling” (Ege, personal communication, April 2019), “judging”, “discrimination” (Ege, Cansu, Dicle, Pelin personal communication, April-May 2019), “exclusion” and “racism” (Ozan, personal communication, May 2019).

Since it came up during all of the interviews, I asked if the interviewees had experienced any type of labelling due to their ethnic, religious, gender or ideological background, which could be the reason behind their migration. They defined their experiences with the concept as "passive othering" (Ege, personal communication, April 2019) or "indirect discrimination" (Ozan, personal communication, May 2019). In this sense, the commonality between all of the interviewees was that none of them have experienced 'othering' because of their identity; but they more defined their feeling of the 'other' as being "oppositional" (Pelin, personal communication, May 2019). We had the following conversation with Ege about what he means by "passive othering":

> *Interviewer:* I see. Have you ever been in trouble?
>
> *Ege:* You mean did I do something illegal? (we both laugh).
>
> Interview: No, not necessarily. But have you ever considered leaving for some other reason than studying?
>
> *Ege:* Well, although nothing serious, there is always this othering thing in Turkey. But we are all in the same bag, as in, everyone others everyone. So, no one really came and told me "you, leave this country!". But for example, now you made me think about an event which happened to me. I was doing a workshop at Gazi University with my colleagues and it was Ramadan month.[11] We were having lunch with other friends, and some dude [we thought that he was from Gazi] came and harassed us saying that we are from ODTÜ[12] and we carry condom in our pockets (laughs). And after that, they literally threw us out of the campus, I don't know what kind of power he had there but something like this happened.
>
> *Interviewer:* Can you think of anything similar happened when you were in Turkey?
>
> *Ege:* (He thinks a while…) Not really… A discrimination like this, no. But passively, yes, always.
>
> *Interviewer:* What do you mean by passively?

[11] Here, Ege implies that students at Gazi University were probably fasting when it happened.

[12] Middle East Technical University, METU.

> *Ege:* I mean… Like we talked earlier. This discriminatory and othering language in politics and in public… It is always there. But I cannot say that it affected my life severely because it was never directed towards my personality.

Judging (societal control)

The term judging came up mostly when I asked the interviewees the most important difference between Turkey and the Netherlands. According to the interviewees, it is "annoying" (Dicle, personal communication, May 2019), "exhausting" (Cansu, personal communication, May 2019) yet, "something that everyone does in Turkey" (Ege, personal communication, May 2019); so they expressed that they are used to it. It, therefore, cannot be the only reason for someone to migrate (Aykut, personal communication, May 2019).

Nevertheless, the concept of 'judging' was important enough for the interviewees to mention it when they were explaining their experiences in the Netherlands compared to Turkey. They all mentioned that they were feeling less comfortable in the public space in Turkey, while "there is a place for everyone" in the Netherlands (Dicle, personal communication, May 2019). For Ege, being able to go to the university campus at Delft with his Crocs slippers (plastic slippers which is usually considered as slippers to be worn inside the house), for example, was something that he defines as 'freedom'.

> *Ege:* I would be wearing fishnet stockings, yet I would not be judged by the others, or they would not stare at me [in the Netherlands]. Can you imagine how people would have looked at me in Ankara?

Cansu, Pelin and Dicle, on the other hand, complained more about the Turkish family structure and human relations which according to their experiences are disguised as "sincere"

while it actually is “suppressive” and “judgmental” (Cansu, Pelin and Dicle, personal communication, May 2019). They explained the Turkish culture as collective in the sense that people (especially one’s relatives and close friends) like to involve in other people’s lives or

interfere as if it is something 'friendly' while they define it as "a way of controlling" or "judging someone's way of living".

3.2. Intentions to stay and return

In addition to the skilled individuals' interpretations of their reasons for leaving, it is crucial to understand their stated intentions to stay or return. It is crucial because I aim to understand what pushed them outside of Turkey, and how they would act if that push-factor would disappear. I, therefore, asked more hypothetical questions to understand under which conditions they would consider returning, such as:

> "Would you ever consider going back to Turkey? If so, under what conditions?"

5 out 6 interviewees expressed that they cannot see a future for themselves in Turkey. They mentioned only going back for holidays, while Ege was almost certain that he wants to go back to Turkey in the long-term, although he prefers to stay and work in the Netherlands for a few years after his studies to save money:

> *Interviewer:* Could you tell me why do you see the Netherlands as temporary?
>
> *Ege:* Hmm, you ask very good questions (laughing). Well, I would say that I love Turkey but it would be so cliché. I mean, I lived my whole life in Ankara, and I have a network there. (…) In addition to that, I feel like I can do more things in Turkey.
>
> *Interviewer:* Such as?
>
> *Ege:* Like I can give more meanings to my life in Turkey. Here, I feel like I am a less important person.
>
> *Interviewer:* What do you mean?

Ege: I mean… I do a lot of things to develop my skills, but when I compare myself to the people here, I am like the many others. When I compare myself to the people in Turkey, I feel like I can do more things in Turkey with what I have learnt here. There are so many problems in Turkey, so it motivates you. As an architect, I see problems when I look at something. And I

> like to solve problems. But here, almost everything is solved, yes people earn quite a lot of money, but it is not exciting. In Turkey… there is so much to fix. The life is given here. In Turkey, you have to do things always.

Except Ege, 5 of the participants are either married or living with their partners in the Netherlands, which I believe is an important reason why they are able to envision their future plans and easily share them with me. Dicle, who is a waitress and has recently graduated from a master's degree in Italy, is living in the Netherlands for about 8 months. Since she does not want to keep her job, she is feeling less settled, while the married working individuals make long-term plans in the Netherlands.

Even though Dicle considers her job as short-term, as a skilled individual working in a non-skilled job, she is considered as a case of "brain waste" in the migration literature (Özden 2006). She explains her situation as follows:

> *Dicle:* My mum came to my graduation in Italy, for example, and she was very proud that I finished a master's degree. And I asked her the other day "mum, you raised me, I studied in good schools, I worked in many other places, and now I am doing waitressing, how do you feel about it?" and she told me that, "it is okay, I know you are much happier there than you could have ever been in here [Turkey]".
>
> *Interviewee:* How about you? How does that make you feel?
>
> *Dicle:* Well, obviously, I cannot be totally cool about it. Sometimes I think to myself, when I am washing the 100th glass, like can I ever find a job (laughs)? But on the other hand, it is a physical work. Something I have never done before. I always worked in offices, and I was surviving with coffee. I feel like this work is something that I was supposed to do at some point in my life so that I can empathise with other people. It also is very indirectly related to my work because I studied cultural management, and I observe how people work in this environment, and it is interesting. In addition to that, I like the people I work with and I know that I will receive my income, it is something that is not guaranteed in Turkey whatever job you have.

As it can be seen from this excerpt, she does not refrain to mention that she prefers to work in the Netherlands as a waitress than doing any other job in Turkey. In a way, she is

representing her case as sacrificing her education and skills, at least in the short-term, in order to avoid returning. The 5 participants, including Dicle, who want to stay in the long term are

quite sure that they will not go back simply because they think that the things that bother them will not change anytime soon:

> *Interviewer:* Did you think that it was a temporary movement or permanent?
>
> *Cansu:* Permanent. I came here being like, nope, I am not going back to Turkey again. It was for my master's, but I knew that I was going to stay. I did not know if it would be permanent in the Netherlands or somewhere else, but I never wanted to go back to Turkey.
>
> *Interview:* Is there a specific reason for that?
>
> *Cansu:* Yes (smiling).
>
> *Interview:* Could you share it with me then?
>
> *Cansu:* Yeah, sure. I was very active at Gezi Park protests in 2014. I saw my friends got injured and killed. At that time, it occurred to me that no one was safe. I know, it was a bit political, but I decided I did not want to be there anymore.
>
> Interviewer: I understand, were there any other moments you felt that way?
>
> *Cansu:* Well, I was studying at Koç University[13], imagine. Even Koç has changed in time. When I first entered there in 2010, the atmosphere was totally different. We were much freer. And then even Koç has become very repressive towards its students.

Here, it can be seen how Cansu used to see her university in a 'better' place than the rest of the country, especially the universities. She tries to explain the worsening of the country's situation by giving examples from the 'best' (according to her perception) universities and institutions of Turkey.

Furthermore, Cansu is considered a case of student non-return according to the literature on brain drain (Oosterbeek and Webbink 2011; Akçapar 2017; Freitas et al. 2012) because she came to the Netherlands to study. However, we can understand from the excerpts how

[13] Koç University is a private university which is owned by one of the richest families (Koç family) in Turkey. It is a highly prestigious and modern university with its campus, academic research opportunities and the university staff.

determined she was to permanently move to the Netherlands, or somewhere else. Even though her initial movement was due to her student status, her migration cannot be explained solely as a student non-return case. Her reasoning of her movement is a more determined and long-term decision because of cultural and political reasons she explains:

Interviewer: Would you consider going back to Turkey? If so, under what conditions?

Cansu: I mean… I don't know, I guess if there is a health problem in the family or something like that. I don't think there is anything else that would make me go back (laughs).

Interviewer: Why do you say this?

Cansu: There isn't any reason, that's why.

Interviewer: Are you saying this because you're married here?

Cansu: I don't know, I guess that's also the case. But I have never really felt like Turkey is my homeland and the only place I can live. I am not saying that I do feel like it in the Netherlands, either. I never feel that I belong somewhere, I always feel like I am in between things. I miss my friends and family but no… I would not move back just for them.

Cansu resisted, so that I had to remind her main motivation of leaving which she indicated that was political, and she gave an example from the government's reaction to the Gezi protestors. So, I asked:

Interviewer: What if your first motivation would disappear?

Cansu: Would it though? (laughs)

Interviewer: What if?

Cansu: Well, the problem is very rooted. So, I don't think that it would change any time soon.

Interviewer: Imagine, what would happen, and would you consider a return?

Cansu: If we are talking about a change in the government (laughs), or something like that, I would not go back just because of that, I think. We have more rooted problems… Our people

are so collective, they are so annoyingly interested in other people's lives… Like in some situations they never read, never research… And the majority of the people are like this. And this situation will not change anytime soon, and this made me want to leave in the first place perhaps…

After we had a conversation about what she means by collective and people being involved in other people's lives; Cansu slightly altered her response about her main reason for leaving. She talked about the family structure and family expectations in Turkey; and towards the end of the interview, she argued that being in the Netherlands helps her to avoid all of these. She also argued that it was the reason she studied in İstanbul while her family was living in Eskişehir. Although she initially tended to represent her case as a result of the government's reaction to the Gezi protestors, she concluded with the structural-cultural reasons which she does not believe would change any time soon.

Discussion

The time and scope of this research allowed me to interview a limited number of participants. The research can be furthered with focus group interviews in which skilled migrants could be selected from different age, gender or occupation groups. A more detailed investigation of the meaning-making process can be made while focusing on different time periods or contexts and comparing them in order to understand how the context and the structure affect the responses of the individuals.

In this thesis, I aimed to understand how skilled migrants interpret their migration within the context of the existing narrative which stresses that brain drain is caused by Turkey's current political and economic crises. Obviously, the current political situation and the main narrative effects how they interpret their migration. However, according to the responses, the most prominent element of their migration is not the short-term political situation, but more structural factors as well as the combination of various social, economic, cultural, political events.

In order to recruit participants, I used the snow balling method and only targeted skilled individuals who moved to the Netherlands after 2015 and received their university bachelor diploma from a Turkish university. Since I did not specifically interview academics or terror suspects who left the country in the aftermath of the failed coup, I ended up interviewing ordinary individuals. The interviewees expressed that they neither faced any kind of severe exclusion when they were living in Turkey, nor did they experience any kind of trouble with the authorities. It was random that nobody had suffered discrimination (directly) and did not justify their migration with authoritarianism or short-term political crisis of the country.

If the participants were in fact from those who were severely affected by the

government's measures after the failed coup and migrated simply because of that, the answers could have been different. In that case, I would have to make a conceptual distinction between the exiles and the migrants which could be a focus of another study.

Semi-Structured Interview Guide and Questions

1. Introduce yourself and the research (broadly).
2. Ask for permission to record the interview, discuss the confidentiality.

Background Questions

1. How old are you?
2. Where are you from in Turkey? (which city)
3. What job were you doing in Turkey?
4. Do you work here, or study?
5. What university degrees do you have and where did you get them?
6. Do you have a partner? Does he/she live here?
7. What is your profession? Are you doing a job you are qualified for?
8. Have you ever lived in another country than Turkey or the Netherlands before?

Status in the Netherlands

9. How long have you been in the Netherlands?
10. Do you hold a residence permit that allows you to work here?
11. Do you have a permanent or temporary residence permit?

Opportunities, life standards and expectations in the Netherlands

12. Can you tell me, what was your main motivation to move abroad?
13. Did you think about it permanent or temporary?
14. Did it matter that it was here or somewhere else?
15. What was the most important thing for you to come to the Netherlands?
16. Are you satisfied with your job?
17. Are you satisfied with your studies?
18. What is your main income? Are you satisfied with your income here?
19. What is the most annoying thing about the Netherlands?

Questions about Turkey

20. What are the biggest differences between Turkey and the Netherlands?
21. What was the most annoying thing in Turkey?
22. Would you ever consider going back to Turkey? If so, under what conditions?
23. What do you miss the most about Turkey?

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